

## Chapter 43

### Interrogating Maddison

Bella looked across her desk to where Madison sat rigidly before her. Even now, the girl was determined to force an air of defiance in the wake of the disaster she'd instigated.

Bella shook her head in distaste. Not only for the detestable young woman sitting before her, but for the undoubtedly unfortunate circumstances that she was sure had pushed Madison to this point. Bella herself remembered that desolate, desperate climb to the top. Clawing your way up from nothing was never pretty but allowing yourself to become so deadened on the inside was no way to live.

Her business wasn't a pretty one - Bella knew that. But she'd worked herself to the bone to create a place where her workers could do their jobs efficiently, and in relative safety. However, the last few days had made it remarkably clear to her how her mission had begun to crumble right from under her while she'd been none the wiser.

Needless to say, there were more than a few holes in her business model that needed to be addressed as soon as possible. And, in Bella's opinion, there was no time like the present.

Her eyes didn't leave Madison's as she reached over to her desktop landline and dialed Xavier's number. For her part, Madison's eyes locked onto her movements and never wavered. The girl was damn near vibrating with the force it took her not to leap from the chair and flee the scene.

Perhaps she still thought that there was a decent chance that she would somehow manage to weasel her way out of the trouble she'd caused. Bella didn't see how, but she had to give it to the girl for her tenacity. For whatever her reasoning, Madison was determined to see this thing through to the other side in order to remain at the club.

"Mr. Michaels," she began, deliberately dropping Xavier's name so that Madison knew exactly with whom she spoke. "Yes, I've located the waitress. A girl named Madison. Human. Right away, Mr. Michaels."

By the time Bella hung up the phone, Madison was visibly sweating. "What was that? What did you just agree to?"

Bella took up a traditionally managerial position, placing both hands on her desk and linking her fingers together in front of her. "That was the Green Light Club's owner I just got off the phone with. Xavier Michaels."

Madison glowered, "Yeah, I gathered. But what does he want to know about me for? I already told you that I didn't have anything to do with Room 701. I turned them down and left. That's it."

Bella nodded, "Yes, well, unfortunately this situation was severe enough to warrant a deeper investigation than I'm authorized to conduct. Therefore, as the club's owner, Mr. Michael would like to interview you personally."

Madison gripped the arms of her chair hard, "To what end? Even if I did do something - which I didn't\* - I'm human. Harming me would go against the Alliance."

Bella raised her hands in a calming gesture, "Madison, it pains me to see how little you clearly you think of this establishment that you've worked in for the last two years. I assure you, fringe though it may be, Mr. Michaels and I are running a reputable business here. This is a routine human resource investigation and nothing more."

With that, Bella picked up her phone and made another call. "A few guards will be here shortly to escort you upstairs."

At the mention of guards, the tension within Madison finally broke. Even as silent, angry tears streaked down the girl's face, she sat ramrod straight glaring at nothing and everything at the same time.

Bella almost felt bad for the girl. What Madison had said was technically true - it was strictly prohibited within the Alliance for Werewolves to harm human beings, and in turn, humans retained peaceful relations with the Wolves.

It was a tenuous balance, both sides requiring constant validation to ensure that no one side gained the upper hand over the other. Finicky as it was, though, the Alliance was one of far too few armistices of its kind in the United States, as well as around the world.

Of the contiguous North American regions, the Northeastern Alliance and the Californian Federation were the only regions who'd achieved complete unification between the two species. To the North, Canada was a viciously selective Wolf- only territory, who rarely offered safe haven to outsiders. Meanwhile, Mexico was a haven for humans who actively plotted to eradicate North America of its 'Lupine Plague'. All of the states in between were an untidy mix of Wolves and humans fighting for social dominance, creating a turbulent - and largely unsafe - nation, depending on who you and where you were.

However, the strict rules governing the Alliance weren't always enough. Xavier's lack of restraint with last night's culprits proved that point well enough. There were plenty of instances where the rules were overlooked on both sides. And judging by the path Xavier was on, Bella could only hope that he kept his senses and handled Madison with care.

If he didn't, she'd be forced to step in, and that could cost her everything. By the end of the day, this entire sordid ordeal would be over, and she needed to prepare for the fallout.

A sudden knock at the door caused Madison to jump, and even Bella felt her shoulders begin to tense. Surprise suffused Bella as Ava, not the guards she'd sent for, walked through the door.

"Ava. You shouldn't be out of bed." Bella said tersely as she entered the office.

Ava looked between where Bella and Madison sat glaring at one another. The tension spanning between the two thick and toxic like smog. She was surprised to find Madison in Bella's office at all, even though she supposed she probably shouldn't be.

"I just came to see if you had a scarf that I could borrow," she said, cautiously stepping further into the room. "What's going on?"

"While unexpected, I suppose this interruption is convenient, to say the least." Bella gestured to where Madison sat frozen, enraged tears sliding down flushed cheeks, "Ava, was Madison the one who sent you to Room 701?"

Madison whipped around from where she'd been glaring daggers at Ava, "No! I don't care what she says, she's had it in for me since she got here!"

Madison stabbed an accusing finger to where Ava stood near the door, "Since the two of you are so close, did she ever tell you about how she watched a Wolf harass me and did nothing to stop it? She saw one of your kind break the Alliance and failed to do her duty and report it!"

She slammed her hand into her chest, "Meanwhile, I'm the one who kept my mouth shut instead of taking my story straight to New York, like I should have. I'm the only reason this dump is still standing right now, and you're going to take the word of some traitor to the Alliance over me? Do you know how much fucking dirt I have on this place?"

"Madison, control yourself." Bella's voice was ice cold, and hard as steel, as she looked at the ranting blonde girl with pure derision on her face, "Now, I'll remind you that I've given you ample time to speak. You've said your piece and now it's time for Ava to say hers."

Bella turned her flint eyes on Ava, "Miss Davis. Is Madison the reason you were sent to Room 701 last night."

Ava briefly looked between Bella and Madison, but didn't waver in her conviction, "Yes."

"Ava!" Madison yelled; her pained voice desperate in a way Ava hadn't expected.

In the time that she'd known her, Ava had gathered that Madison wasn't the sort who took well to the consequences of their own actions. There were always those people who could talk themselves out of their own culpability, no matter how obvious a part they've played.

Still, Ava was bewildered by the naked betrayal Madison projected her way. She couldn't have thought Ava would feel the slightest bit inclined to protect her. Even if the girl hadn't just berated Ava to her face \*again\*, it was clear that whatever bid for innocence she'd been making had already failed long before Ava arrived in this office.

Ava jumped as the door behind her opened and a few of the club's security members walked in.

"We're here to take the girl up to see Alpha Michaels."

"No!" Madison screamed at the guard, "I said I didn't do anything to her! If you touch me, you're in violation of the Alliance. I'll have you tossed out of the region so fast it'll make your furry fucking tail spin."

All of a sudden, Madison's mania came into focus. If Madison saw Xavier now, especially in the state that she was in, she was a goner. Awful excuse for a person though she was, Ava couldn't have whatever Xavier would do on her conscience. She stepped in front of the guards as they hauled Madison toward the exit.

"Wait. I'm coming with you."